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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

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SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS SITREP
#9: JANUARY 20, 2006: JERUSALEM VOTING PROCEDURES
FINALIZED; GUNMEN DISRUPT CAMPAIGN IN NABLUS

REF: JERUSALEM 00238

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Central Elections Committee (CEC) published the finalized procedures for East Jerusalem voting on January 19. President Abbas signed a decree advancing the voting period for members of the PASF by one day to begin on January 21. Dozens of East Jerusalem residents clashed with Israeli security forces attempting to arrest two unidentified individuals who were posting election materials in Sur Baher. In Khuzaa' village near Khan Younis, a standoff between hundreds of Hamas and Fatah activists nearly erupted into serious clashes. In other election related violence, Fatah gunmen attacked the magistrate court and attempted to force a print shop to close in Nablus. END SUMMARY.

CEC Publishes Finalized Voting
Procedures for Jerusalem

¶2. (SBU) The Central Elections Committee (CEC) published the procedures for East Jerusalem voting. A total of 6,300 Jerusalem ID holders will be allowed to vote at six East Jerusalem post offices in the following numbers: Salahedin Street (3,550 voters), Beit Hanina (550 voters), al-Tur (550 voters), Sur Baher (550 voters), Jaffa Gate (550 voters), Shufat (550 voters). Special voting tickets will be handed out to the public on a first-come, first-served basis between January 21 and 23. The tickets will be handed out at three East Jerusalem private schools. A total of 16 polling outside municipality will also receive Jerusalem ID holders on Election Day in the villages of Bit Nabala, Anata, al-Ram, al-Ziayem, Ezariya, Abu Dis and Sheikh Saad.

PASF Voting Advanced One Day

¶3. (C) President Abbas signed a decree advancing the voting period for members of the PASF by one day, from January 21-23. The vote counting of the roughly 60,000 security personnel will be conducted along with the general public vote on January 25. MOI officials expressed optimism to Poloff during a January 19 telcon that the adjustment in dates would help relieve the logistical difficulties of security personnel having to return home to cast ballots.

Sur Baher Clashes with
Israeli Police

¶4. (C) Dozens of East Jerusalem residents clashed with Israeli security forces as they attempted to arrest two

unidentified individuals posting election materials in Sur Baher. Israeli police officers fired stun grenades to disperse the crowd. The Israeli police also closed an office in Sur Baher on suspicion that it was being used to conduct Hamas campaign activities and arrested two campaign activists.

Anti-American Hamas Election Propaganda

¶5. (SBU) Hamas activists placed a large poster at the entrance to Ramallah saying, "Israel and US said No to Hamas! What do you say? Vote for Hamas slate number 6." The board also carries the picture of Sheikh Yassin -- Hamas's spiritual leader who was killed by Israeli rockets two years ago.

Armed Factions Pledge to Protect Elections

¶6. (SBU) The military wings of several factions including the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (AMB), Qassam, Ahmad Abu al-Rish armed factions published a statement vowing to protect the Palestinian elections. In Jenin, AMB held a demonstration on January 19 and urged people to vote in the elections and declared that AMB would cooperate with the PASF.

Fatah Candidate Arrested

¶7. (SBU) Israeli police detained Ahmad 'Abd al-Rahman, a Fatah candidate, for holding an elections rally in Shufat.

Hamas-Fatah Tensions in Gaza

¶8. (C) In Khuzaa' village near Khan Younis, a standoff between hundreds of Hamas and Fatah activists nearly erupted into serious clashes. Local sources said that during a Hamas election rally, individuals affiliated with Fatah cut the power supply. Dozens of Fatah activists started chanting anti-Hamas slogans and blocked the road preventing Hamas leader Mahmud al-Zahar from leaving the area. The situation was eventually resolved without clashes. This comes as the first incident between the two movements signed an agreement on January 18 agreeing to abide by the democratic process. Subsequently, senior officials of the two movements met to defuse further tensions.

Gunmen Disrupt Campaigning in Nablus

¶9. (C) Fatah national list candidate and AMB chief for Balata Camp, Jamal al-Tirawi, sent gunmen to disrupt the Main Court (Magistrate) in Nablus on January 19 and ordered the court to close until further notice, according to Fatah contacts in the Nablus governor's office. An armed faction reportedly affiliated with al-Tirawi attacked the court on January 19, placing graffiti on the walls declaring that elections have been canceled. Al-Tirawi is disgruntled with his inability to gain a higher place on the Fatah national list and the court's refusal to intervene in an internal Fatah matter. In a separate incident, gunmen in Nablus attempted to shutdown a print shop to prevent the production of posters for Fatah district candidate Ghassan al-Shakaa.

Main Press Stories

¶10. (SBU) Al-Ayyam and Al-Quds led with coverage of the legislative elections and reported that Palestinian security forces will start voting tomorrow. Reports added that the PA will deploy approximately 13,000 police to patrol and provide security in the Palestinian Territories in the three days

leading up to elections.

-- Al-Quds highlighted a January 19 meeting in Ramallah, in which PA President Abbas provided an update on preparations for the elections to the head of the EU Observation Mission for the Palestinian elections.

-- Al-Quds also carried front-page coverage of a press briefing with U.S. NEA/PPD Director Alberto Fernandez, who told Palestinian journalists that it is necessary for Palestinians to choose able leadership to move the peace process forward. The article also quoted Fernandez, who described a "smart" Palestinian as one who can envision appropriate means to achieve Palestinian strategic aspirations.

-- Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reported that Israeli forces arrested Jerusalem Fatah candidates Ahmad Abdul Rahman and Khalil Abu Zayyad yesterday while they were campaigning, and closed down a Hamas office in Jerusalem.

Op-eds

-- Samih Shubaib commented in Al-Ayyam that since the next legislative council will include different factions -- Fatah, Hamas, left wing and other parties, a new political system will arise that dissolves political unilateralism and replaces it with pluralism.

-- Referring to the January 19 Palestinian Islamic Jihad suicide bombing in Tel Aviv and how it and other similar operations reflect negatively on the elections process, Ashraf Ajrami opined in Al-Ayyam that Palestinians must not fail to remember that in addition to being very badly timed, this bombing occurred at a time when the Palestinian people are in desperate need of real calm to complete the democratic process successfully.⁸

WALLES